Dr. Nefretiri Cooley, Deputy Secretary for Communications and External Affairs

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Dr. Nefretiri Cooley, Deputy Secretary for Communications and External Affairs



Dr. Nefretiri Cooley was appointed by Governor Gavin Newsom in July 2023 to serve as Deputy Secretary for Communications and External Affairs at the California Environmental Protection Agency (CalEPA).

Cooley previously served as the California Water Boardsâ?? first communications director, where she unified the Office of Public Affairs and the Office of Public Participation to elevate and strengthen communications, outreach, and engagement for the State Water Board and the nine Regional Water Quality Control Boards (collectively, California Water Boards). Cooley also co-led the State Water Boardâ??s racial equity work, playing a key role in developing its historic resolution and racial equity action plan. In addition, Cooley is a certified trainer of trainers for advancing racial equity at CalEPA.

Before joining the CalEPA family, Cooley served as University of the Pacificâ??s executive director of marketing and communications from 2018 to 2020. There, she worked to expand and develop the universityâ??s strategic communications team and increase its reach and impact. From 2015 to 2018, she was executive director of Student Affairs Marketing and Communications at University of California, Davis, where she also served as founding director of Student Affairs Marketing and Communications from 2011 to 2015.

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Cooleyâ??s professional accomplishments include, among others, co-leading the launch of UC Davisâ?? first sexual violence education and awareness campaign, which earned five industry awards; receiving the Martin Luther King, Jr. Social Justice Award in recognition of her advocacy for UC Davis African American faculty, staff and students; being honored with the UC Davis Michele Dyke Humanitarian Award for her contributions to the university community; earning a UC Davis Student Affairs Point of Pride Award for her leadership contributions to the White House Summit on Educational Excellence for African Americans at UC Davis; and being a Sacramento Business Journal â??40 Under 40â?• awardee.

Cooley earned a Ph.D. in business administration (executive research concentration) from Oklahoma State University, where her research focused on storytelling. She also holds a Master of Arts in publications design (writing and graphic design) from University of Baltimore, and a double Bachelor of Arts in English and Rhetoric & Communication from University of California, Davis. Cooley is a Gallup-certified CliftonStrengths Coach.

Executive Management Biographies

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